The World of Letters As Others See It

The Drama League Sign Post.

ILLICIT love in the new plays of this season was more or less present in half of the twenty-two put out on its Sign Post by the Drama League in eighteen of the fifty-one I saw and in forty of one hundred of those given. While the Drama League Sign Post has from eight to ten plays on its list each week, it marks but from one to three of them with a dagger as "suitable for young people." That does not mean plays for children, as was shown when the League of Christmas and Easter made special lists for young people and added such plays as "Bulldog Drummond," "Captain Applejack," "Thank You," "Six Cylinder Love," "To the Ladies," &c., which they had not considered of sufficient distinction to go in the regular weekly Sign Post, and it must be admitted that most of the sex plays chosen by the league were written with more distinction and ability than these supplementary antiseptic pieces, for the post-war depression that kept Barrie off the stage this season and brought Shaw in "Back to Methuselah" to about his lowest level had sapped our comedy writers of real, rich, joyful zest. Shaw's picture of life "as far as thought can reach" was certainly horrible and depressing. He showed future mankind as living fifteen years in the egg, feeling sex attraction for but two, and then giving themselves up to contemplation for the rest of a long life.—*From "Drama of Sex, Disaster and Hope." By Roland Holt in the Forum.*

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American and English Juveniles.

THE difference between American and British juvenile fiction is the difference between the interminable Alger books and the (if you like) interminable Henty books. Each is possibly the best known man in his particular field in his own country. Alger wrote his moralistic tales with a rubber stamp, then filled in the names: Henty worked carefully and produced a creditable literature, including a number of juvenile masterpieces. While Mr. Owen Johnson's Lawrenceville stories are thoroughly and wonderfully American, they were not written for boys any more than were Stephen Crane's "Whilomville Stories" or Mr. Tarkington's "Penrod" tales: they were written for men and women. Even Mr. Aldrich's delightful "Story of a Bad Boy"—even, if you please, "Tom Sawyer" and "Huckleberry Finn" — find greater favor with grownups than they ever have found or ever will find with boys. The Lawrenceville tales by Mr. Johnson do not offset the school stories of Talbot Baines Reed, the Englishman: the latter were specifically written for boys and are specifically read by boys. There can be no comparison between these writers; but if we compare Mr. Reed and Mr. Barbour we must give the Englishman the best of it.—*From "Books of the Golden Age." By Vincent Starrett in the Freeman.*

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Hearn's Appearance and Politics.

HEARN was a most unprepossessing object at first sight. That odd, rolling eye of his was the only thing you could see at first—enormous, protruding. After you got used to that eye you saw that his other features were very good and his face refined. But in addition, when he first presented himself here he was miserably dressed, and even his hands were grimy and his nails black. One reason why Bigney hesitated about taking him on was that we had heard that he had to leave Memphis on account of his violently republican ideas. Perhaps I oughtn't to tell that even now—but surely the war is over by this time! In those days, however, it was a serious thing in this part of the world, and it worked against Hearn.—*From "Lafcadio Hearn in New Orleans." By John S. Kendall in the Double Dealer.*

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The Librarian and His Problem.

NOT the brightest and most efficient wonder worker of a trained librarian can make three copies of Mr. Wells's "Outline of History" go round among four hundred people who wish to read it without forcing some of them to wait a long, long time—until, in fact, the clergyman, or the study club leader, or the lecturer have begun to drop Mr. Wells and to talk about Mr. Van Loon and *his* history. There is no modern scheme of efficiency which will make ten copies of "If Winter Comes" or of "Cytherea" satisfy the insistent demands of hundreds, thousands, of applicants who wish the book within a few weeks of publication.

"But," grandly says the critic, "buy more copies." It is at this point that the librarian shows his self-control by not sinking back in his chair and allowing his whole frame to be racked with sobs. Buy more copies! He wishes he had money enough to buy any copies at all of many books whose absence is a reproach. He does not weep, however; he merely indicates gently that the library is hard up. "What? Not money enough?" says the critic. "Why, I supposed you had all the money you need—with all this!" And a wave of the hand toward the mural painting representing the discovery of printing, or the marble columns in the reading room, or the bronze statue of the founder of the library illustrates his belief in untold hoards at the librarian's disposal.—*From "What's the Matter With the Public Library?" By Edmund Lester Pearson in the Independent.*

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Pope After Two Centuries.

WHAT remains of the great Lord Bolingbroke's London residence must be demolished to make room for a flour mill extension, and the famous Cedar Room in which Alexander Pope is said to have written his "Essay on Man" will be sold, says the London *Times*, and brought to America. What will be its fate in this country is not reported. But whether a museum will boast of it or it becomes the "den" of an American millionaire, it will be far enough from the tastes and thoughts that linked the rimes and modulated the rhythms of the "Essay on Man." We feel that our problems are not solved by antique saws, however learnedly culled—no more, in fact, were theirs. Even more strongly, perhaps, our younger people feel that the new wine of our spirit cannot be held in such old bottles of rigid form. Nevertheless the visitor to this shrine may not improperly reflect that not what Pope himself thought to be very modern in his verse gives it life to-day. We are further from its eighteenth century modernism than from its spirit of humanistic restraint; what he thought was mere bottle—the carrying forward of the great tradition of discipline and form—was, in fact, its living wine; what he thought was new wine—its eighteenth century thinking—has turned out to be mere bottle.—*From the Independent.*

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A Prophecy of 1870.

WHEN Carleton was dying in 1870 he said there would be nothing more about Irish literature for twenty years, and his words were fulfilled, for the land war had filled Ireland with its bitterness; but imagination had begun to stir again; I had the same confidence in the future that Lady Gregory and I had eight or nine years later, when we founded an Irish theater, though there were neither, as it seemed, plays nor players. There were already a few known men to start my popular series, and to keep it popular until the men, whose names I did not know, had learned to express themselves. I had met Dr. Douglas Hyde when I lived in Dublin, and he was still an undergraduate. I had set him down as a peasant, and wondered what brought him to college, and to a Protestant college, but somebody explained that he belonged to some branch of the Hydes of Castle Hyde, and that he had a Protestant rector for father. He had much frequented the company of old countrymen, and had so acquired the Irish language, and his taste for snuff and for moderate quantities of a detestable species of illegal whisky distilled from the potato by certain of his neighbors. He had already—though intellectual Dublin knew nothing of it—considerable popularity as a Gaelic poet, mowers and reapers singing his songs from Donegal to Kerry. Years afterward I was to stand at his side and listen to Galway mowers singing his Gaelic words without knowing whose words they sang.—*From "More Memoirs." By William Butler Yeats in the Dial.*

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Why Did Lafcadio Hearn Leave Cincinnati?

MANY stories are told about Hearn's departure from Cincinnati. Miss Kinnaird, a relative, in her biography, hints at a love affair which did far more credit to his heart than to his head. There is a tradition of a long illness, when he was nursed by a faithful negress, and of an attempt to marry her by way of expressing his gratitude; which was frustrated by friends, who furnished the means to get him out of the city, on his way to New Orleans. But a stronger motive existed in the fascination which the tropics always exerted upon his imagination. The narrative published in the Birmingham *News* some years ago by Rudolph Benson, based upon statements made by Edwin Henderson, then city editor of the Cincinnati *Commercial Gazette* and afterward city clerk in Cincinnati, seems to me to explain perfectly why New Orleans attracted Hearn. Mr. Henderson says that Hearn had been on the *Enquirer*, and had done work for that paper which was considered very remarkable, notably the reporting of the famous Tanyard murders, but had been dismissed by Mr. Cockerill "because, it was alleged, of his deplorable personal habits." What these "deplorable habits" were we are not informed.—*From "Lafcadio Hearn in New Orleans." By John S. Kendall in the Double Dealer.*

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The Arthurian Legends.

THE project for a poetical rendition of the Arthurian legends was entertained by the poet for many years. It found its first expression in "The Lady of Shalott," which appeared in the poems of 1833, and was followed in 1837 by "St. Agnes," and in 1842 by three more lyrics: "Sir Galahad," "Sir Launcelot" and "Queen Guinevere." The 1842 volumes also contain "Morte d'Arthur," which later became part of "The Passing of Arthur." The Arthurian scheme was broadened in scope when fifteen years later Tennyson had his printers produce trial copies in folded sheets of two epics under the title "Enid and Nimue, or the True and the False." These were sent to critical friends with injunction to return to the author. Only three of these trial copies are now known to have survived. One was presented to the British Museum by Francis Turner Palgrave; one was bequeathed with other books to South Kensington Museum by John Forster, and one, discovered among the books of Sir John Simeon many years after his decease, was sent by Lady Simeon in 1904, with a few other volumes from Sir John's library, to be sold at auction.—*From "My Tennysons." By William Harris Arnold in Scribner's Magazine.*

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Shakespeare's Songs.

PERHAPS only a primary intention can be claimed for "Sigh no more, ladies." Benedick, hiding in the arbor, was meant to hear the song, although it was ostensibly sung for Claudio, but at least something more than an obvious effect may be claimed for a ditty which, chanting women's revolt against love, thus partly gives the counterpart to Benedick's interrupted reflections on the revolt of men. On the borderline we find also "It was a lover and his lass," a snatch of the poetic idyllic calculated with Freudian ingenuity to show Touchstone, with Audrey at his side, what his "unconscious" was thinking of the practical idyllic, and that nice food for Jacques's spleen, "Under the greenwood tree" and "Tell me where is fancy bred," to which Bassanio was not supposed to listen, though, overhearing its words, he must insensibly be turned away from the outward shows. In "Twelfth Night" we come upon two deliberate exercises of secondary dramatic purpose. "Let's have a catch," says Sir Toby, and a moment later, with the instability of the tipsy, he chooses a love song. But "O mistress mine" was assuredly not the sort of love song that he wanted. — *From the London Times.*

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Disraeli's Byronic Manner.

BYRON died in 1824. Disraeli "carried on" in 1826 by publishing at 21 his first novel, "Vivian Grey," in which the hero, meditating a career in Parliament, thinks "Don Juan" may serve as a model for his style in the Commons, Milton in the House of Lords. He introduced Byron as Apollo in his delectable skit "Ixion in Heaven" and as Lord Cadurcis in "Venetia." Traveling through the East in imitation of his predecessor, he conceived his "Revolutionary Epick," with its apotheosis of Napoleon, at a Byronic moment, "standing," as he tells us, with full sense of the romantic magnificence of his posture, "upon Asia, and gazing upon Europe, with the broad Hellespont alone between us, and the shadow of night descending on the mountains." He carried on by returning to England smoking a chibouk in token of his Oriental sojourn. He wrote Oriental tales. He thought himself a great poet afflicted with a hopeless woe. He indulged in gloomy vapors and in outbursts of cynicism. He anticipated the sallies of Whistler and Wilde by remarking to a host who had praised his own wine at a dinner party and boasted that he had wine twenty times as good in the cellar: "No doubt, no doubt, but my dear fellow, this is quite good enough for such *canaille* as you have got to-day." He carried on the Byronic dandyism as a readily available means of imposing upon the imagination of his time.—*From "The Disraelian Irony." By Stuart P. Sherman in the Bookman.*

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Hard Work and Experience.

THE fog of "Bohemianism" which, until quite lately, surrounded the doings of the journalist has probably deluded a good many people as to how a journalist came into successful being. His origin, his experiences, his struggles, his method of work were all obscure. The public saw him only when he "arrived," and hence it was excusable to believe that he had suddenly and miraculously jumped into fame, and that others might do the same. But the reality was widely different. There is hardly a successful writer of the past who had not worked through a long and trying experience of difficulty, discouragement and doubt whilst he was gaining what he lacked—technical knowledge. Every successful writer has had to gain this knowledge one way or the other. Barrie, Stevenson, Gissing—pick the names haphazard if you will—all could tell of dismal days and discouraging failures. They learned this lesson in the hard school—experience.—*From John o' London's Weekly.*

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Tribute to R. M. Ballantyne.

IT was Stevenson, was it not, who remarked that he would sacrifice something very valuable—perhaps his entire list of writings—to have written "The Coral Island"? Personally, I would not have it in exchange for "Treasure Island"; but 'tis a brave tale! the *magnum opus* of Robert Michael Ballantyne of the Hudson Bay Company. The astonishing experiences of that delectable company of shipwrecked adventurers on a coral reef in the Pacific are among the most moving and memorable episodes in juvenile letters. The wanderers themselves liked it, for it will be remembered that the irrepressible Peterkin sought out his erstwhile companions of the coral strand and took them upon adventures equally wild in a sequel called "The Gorilla Hunters." The first few paragraphs of this latter volume yield a clew to the excellence of the juvenile literature of that day; they could have been written only by Ballantyne—or Dickens! That is the secret. It was a day of honest writing, and the writers for adult readers had no monopoly of ideals or invention. Ballantyne was, and is, the Dickens of juvenile literature. In the same rollicking spirit of caricature with which Dickens captured his millions, Ballantyne carried on. Were there any mystery about this ingenious author I should venture the suggestion that his books were written by Charles Dickens.—*From "Books of the Golden Age." By Vincent Starrett in the Freeman.*

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The Famous Walking Match.

I HAD barely time yesterday, after the girls left, to dress and prepare some flowers and some lunch and make my way in a carriage first to the Parker House at Mr. Dickens's kind request to see if all the table arrangements were perfect for the dinner. I found he had done everything he could think of to make the feast go off well and had really left nothing for me to suggest, so I turned about and drove over the mill dam, following Messrs. Dickens, Dolby, Osgood and Fields, who had left just an hour before on a walking match of six miles out and six in. This agreement was made and articles drawn up several weeks ago, signed and sealed in form by all the parties, to come off without regard to the weather. The wind was blowing strong from the northwest, very cold and the snow blowing, too. They had turned and were coming back when I came up with them. Osgood was far ahead and, after saluting them all and giving a cheer for America, discovering too that they had refreshed on the way, I drove back to Mr. Osgood, keeping near him and administering brandy all the way in town. The walk was accomplished in precisely two hours forty-eight minutes.—*From "With Dickens in America." By M. A. de Wolfe Howe in Harper's Magazine.*

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Dickens and the Pirates.

THE collector, as well as the bibliographer, of Dickens's first editions has a sufficiently wide field for his energies without concerning himself with publications which would never have seen light but for the enormous popularity of "Sketches by Boz" and other fiction by Charles Dickens. Mr. Eckel's "Bibliography" of Dickens's first editions runs into 300 pages; and a complete bibliography of Dickensiana, such as plays founded upon his novels, pirated editions, imitations and parodies, would probably fill up almost as much space. The "imitations" form a very interesting phase in the byways of collecting, and the curious fact in connectiontion with them is that they are without exception far rarer than their prototypes, and even more difficult to obtain in "collectors'" copies. They illustrate a bygone phase of literary Grub street which would be impossible to-day; and their promoters would now receive scant consideration from our magistrates.—*From the London Times.*

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The Tennysons at Cambridge.

THE next year, 1828, both Alfred and Charles matriculated at Trinity, where they soon became leaders of a literary group of aspiring students. A relic of this period now in my possession is a classical atlas which belonged to Alfred and has his name written on the white lining of the front cover. Also in his delicate hand on the inside of the back cover is a list of classmates, doubtless the sympathetic intimates of the young poet. Here among a score of names we find Merivale, who became dean of Ely and the distinguished historian of Rome; Milnes, later Lord Houghton, the first biographer of Keats; Selwin, afterward Anglican Bishop of New Zealand; Buller, who gained fame as a Liberal statesman, and Hallam, brother poet, the best beloved. The subject for the English prize poem at the University of Cambridge for the year 1829 was "Timbuctoo." Tennyson was the successful competitor. In accordance with custom the author would have read the poem in the Senate House, but then, as in later life, he had an aversion to all publicities and, by request, his friend Merivale relieved him of the distasteful honor—*From "My Tennysons." By William Harris Arnold in Scribner's Magazine.*